

Ricky Mentha

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My name is Ricky Mentha. I have lived in Alice Springs for the past seventeen years growing up my four children with my partner. We reside 60 kilometers west of Alice Springs on an outstation called Angkerele Arrunga Arrtitjika which is five kilometers south of Stanley Chasm. In that time I have been employed in various roles in around Central Australia from my humble beginnings as a CDEP worker to supervisor, housing officer for the Alice Springs Town camps and eventually into a community development position based at Tangentyere Council. This position was funded in partnership with the National Heart foundation and the Myer Foundation. Additionally I have worked in the tourism industry and also in the mining sector. But my dream was to contribute in the Aboriginal health arena and I became a Male Aboriginal Health Worker in 1997 where I undertook a position at the Alice Springs Renal Unit. I got my first realistic look at the chronic disease burden of Indigenous morbidity and mortality.

My introduction into the world of academic health research began at Tangentyere Council when I was employed to undertake a community survey reflecting the Indigenous remote mobility and populations of the Alice Springs Town camps and this was in partnership with the Centre for Remote Health. I was later appointed to a Research Capacity Development position at Centre for Remote Health for two years undertaking project evaluations and being introduced to the social determinants of health related illness. This is where I met Dr Alex Brown who became my self-appointed mentor. Alex gave great advice and helped me to conceptualise certain issues Indigenous people faced in terms Indigenous health disparity and the national health life expectancy gaps that linked my past and soon to be future.

Alex enticed me to come and work with him at the Baker IDI. Where I would be able to pursue my interest in Indigenous chronic disease and continue to contribute in the health arena to understanding the pathways to chronic illness, along with health service access barriers and this has been made possible through my role as an Indigenous Research Fellow conducting qualitative interviews with the local populations.